DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 136 CS 014 082

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TITLE Professional Bandwagons and Local Discursive Effects: Reporting the Literate Student.
PUB DATE 1996-11-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education (Singapore, China, November 25-29, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Case Studies; Disadvantaged Schools; Disadvantaged Youth; Discourse Analysis; Discourse Communities; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; *Literacy; *Report Cards; *Student Development; *Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS Australia; Identity Formation; *Teacher Language; *Teacher Writing

ABSTRACT

Despite the considerable attention given to literacy assessment, there has been very little examination of one of the most common assessment and reporting practices; namely, the teacher written report card. What kinds of literate subjects are constructed in teachers' written assessments of students and what are the effects for different students? This paper considers what counts officially as literacy in one small school serving a socioeconomically disadvantaged community. Through the examination of teacher written report cards, the paper shows how literacy assessments draw on a multiplicity of discourses in compiling the literate student. In the paper, this analysis indicates the ways in which educational discursive practices have specific local effects on the assessment of children's literacy and consequently on the ways in which students' identities are constituted in terms of success and failure. In particular, the paper traces the primary school career of one student as documented in the report archive. A post-structuralist discourse analysis of the local up-take of forms of "official knowledge" can provide hard insights concerning the differential material effects and unanticipated consequences of discursive practices on students' educational trajectories. Using such an approach in the paper demonstrates how children may be unwittingly disadvantaged despite teachers' best intentions and commitments to progressive pedagogical theories. (Contains 2 figures and 30 references.) (NKA)

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Professional Bandwagons and Local Discursive Effects: Reporting the Literate Student.

by Barbara Comber

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Professional bandwagons and local discursive effects: Reporting the literate student

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In text saturated societies, literate practices increasingly organise the mundane routines of life, work and consumerism, leisure and cultural pursuits, the need for the production of a literate population has become, in Foucault's terms, a 'truth' of post-industrial fast capitalist societies. Governments have made literacy a political and economic imperative, devoting considerable sums of money towards literacy education for all citizens. In this managerial context, the need to account for this spending requires that students' literate competencies are closely monitored and assessed, both nationally and locally. In modern disciplinary societies this examination takes many forms and happens as a part of everyday practice.

Literacy educators have long proclaimed the evils of standardised tests and the inevitability of inequitable outcomes on such measures for 'non-mainstream' students. Recently, teacher and student based 'authentic' assessments which take into account the complexity of reading and writing processes and monitor individual development have been strongly promoted by professional associations (see for example International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English Joint Task Force on Assessment 1994) and also by teacher unions. However despite the considerable attention given to literacy assessment, there has been very little examination of one of the most common assessment and reporting practices: namely, the teacher written report card (see Afflerbach & Johnston 1993; McKenzie 1992 for exceptions). It may be that the report card is simply taken for granted and its significance in the lives of students down-played.

Assessment involves sets of discursive practices where the gaze of the teacher and institutional disciplinary practices combine to produce a visible and semi-permanent record of the educable individual. In many modern schools, assessment involves continual monitoring and writing regular written statements about each student. This surveillance culminates in 'report cards' and 'parent-teacher interviews' - teachers' official accounts of children's work in schools. The teacher evaluates the performance of individuals across grids of specification which change from time to time. Areas specified may include literacy, maths, environmental studies, behaviour, religious education, physical education and so on. In another school at another time and place the 'subjects' for assessment may be very different. For example students may be assessed on reading, writing and spelling, or language arts, or English. In dividing and naming the literacy field, the report card textually marks out curriculum priorities and local rationalities. My question is: What kinds of literate subjects are constructed in teachers' written assessments of students and what are the effects for different students?

In this paper I consider what counts officially as literacy in one small school serving a socio-economically disadvantaged community (which I call Banfield). By examining teacher written report cards, I show how literacy assessments draw on a multiplicity of discourses in compiling the literate student. This analysis indicates the ways in which educational discursive practices have specific local effects on the assessment of children's literacy and consequently on the ways in which students' identities are constituted in terms of success and failure. In particular, I trace the primary school career of one student as documented in the report archive.

Whilst some neo-marxian educators remain skeptical of 'postmodern' theories (Anyon 1994; Apple 1993), a post-structuralist discourse analysis of the local up-take of forms of 'official knowledge' can provide hard insights concerning the differential material effects and unanticipated consequences of discursive practices on students' educational trajectories (Cherryholmes 1994; Luke 1995). Here, using such an approach I demonstrate how children may be unwittingly disadvantaged despite teachers' best intentions and commitments to progressive pedagogical theories.

Compiling the ideal literate subject in the nineties

The report card can be seen as a key site in the process of 'compiling the student'. Here the teacher assessor documents officially how the student measures up along a continuum of ethical and literate competencies (Hunter 1994). Having examined the child across grids of specification they construct a semi-permanent official record of the institutionalised individual (Collins 1991; Luke 1989). Teachers do not write report cards in a vacuum but in specific times and places. How students are assessed, what counts as literacy and how students are described, are subject not only to immediate contextual constraints but also to macro educational and political discourses and practices. In Australia, the late eighties and the early nineties was a period of discursive turmoil and contestation in literacy education. The ascendancy of 'economic rationalism' in government budgets and the dominance of managerial discourses in government policy was noted and lamented by numerous educational theorists (Gee & Lankshear 1995; Knight et al. 1994). During this period the literacy standards of the population became a matter for government policy and media attention.

Progressive approaches to education, and whole language specifically, were under attack from both the right and the left in terms of alleged student outcomes (Connell 1993; Freebody & Welch 1993; Green et al. 1994). The right made claims that declining standards had produced a literacy crisis and the left argued that disadvantaged students were failed by schooling and school literacies. Repeated themes in media reports included the declining standards of literacy in the community, the ineffectiveness of state schooling and the inappropriateness of child-centred progressive methods of literacy instruction. In 1991 the first national policy on language gave considerable emphasis to the

economic and social costs of poor literacy and the need to monitor the literacy standards of the Australian community.

In 1992, when I came to the corpus of Banfield reports my aim was to investigate what counted as literacy for that community at that time and to specify the grids of behaviours, attitudes, aptitudes across which students were evaluated. I hoped to track the 'traverse of discourses' (Luke & Luke 1995) from macro economic, political and educational locations to teachers' textual practices in school reports.

> Similar statements, constructions, images and metaphors may appear and reappear in written and spoken texts like the policy document, the syllabus, principals' memos, the staffroom conversation, the teachers' guidebook, and, of course, the textbook. (Luke & Luke 1995, p.371)

Following this approach, I examined the entire corpus of report cards written by the four teachers during 1992 (approximately 300 reports - 3 reports for each child). There was no consistent format for report cards with the staff having decided to do things, as they put it, 'in their own unique ways'. The layout and design were not prescribed, there were no boxes to tick and in the first two reports of the school year there were no standard subject headings or divisions (see Fig.2).

On the surface then, the Banfield report appeared an open-ended document – a blank page to be filled by each teacher writer as she saw fit. However, across the corpus there was evidence of common discursive practices. The impact of progressive developmental discourses was clear in the trend towards holistic, naturalistic assessment, based on 'kid-watching'. Teachers wrote in terms of 'observed behaviours' and 'signs of development'. Mostly, teachers produced one full page of text.

Closer analysis indicated that the reports were not only similar in terms of lay-out and broad approach, but also in terms of how students were described. I began by examining the vocabulary used, because as Kamler (1994) points out lexical choices are not insignificant; networks of words illuminate the discourses employed. Words construct specified grids, norms against which the student can be judged. Key lexical items across this corpus of reports included 'work', 'develop', 'task', 'time', 'success'. For example, the word 'work' (or worked, works, working, worker) appeared 594 times on a computer search of 148 reports. It is interesting to note that on the same scan the word 'learn' (or learnt/learned, learns, learning, learners) appeared 187 times. This scan indicated that no other key words were used anywhere near as frequently as work: task (179), develop (170), help (166), time (161), success (122), progress (59), commit (53), strategies (4), manage (33). In the same scan, writing appeared 185 times, spelling 109 times, language 44 times, reading 35 times, grammar 6 times, and speaking on one occasion.

This broad analysis, including vocabulary counts, highlighted the significance of the managerial discourse in the formation of the student at Banfield at that time. However teachers did not draw exclusively on the managerial discourse but blended it with other discourses: educational ('skills',

'strategies', 'progress', 'learning'), psychological ('displays', 'development', 'attitude') political ('justice') and moral ('helpful', 'cooperative', 'commitment'). After an analysis of the reports of a number of successful students I constructed a grid summarising the ideal student as constituted in teacher's reports. The consistency of what counted across the teacher writers was notable.

Fig. 1 The ideal student

Observable behaviours	Attitudes	Contributions to the class community
• working quietly • remaining on task • having necessary equipment • clarifying tasks • asking questions • seeking help • managing time • evaluating own progress • completing work	• being committed • being enthusiastic • [being] without aggression • being responsible • being keen to meet work expectations • being positive • having a healthy attitude to learning	• being sensitive • being compassionate • being fair and just • being helpful and cooperative • forming positive relationships with peers • helping, supporting and encouraging others • contributing thoughts, ideas and opinions • summarising discussions • making insightful observations • having a sense of humour • building on opinions of others • ready to take on extra duties

The specified observable behaviours explained how the student should relate to their teacher and their work. The ideal student actively related to the teacher by seeking help, asking questions and clarifying tasks. Further, the student was prepared for work, works quietly and consistently, evaluates their own progress and completes tasks on time. A teacher-student-work relationship is constituted here. The ideal student is one who initiates contact with the teacher in order to get the job done. Such a student is self-regulated individual. When students display such behaviours, the teacher is able to make diagnostic assessments about student attitudes - commitment, enthusiasm, responsibility, a healthy attitude to learning and so on. Students are congratulated on these assumed internal attitudes, which allow them to become successful students. While this may appear as positive and benign with reference to the successful student, as I will show later there are problems with teachers diagnosing students' internal states, especially when the students represent neither the ideal, nor the norm. Luke explains:

> The danger here is that, as 'behavioural clinician' (Foucault, 1977), the teacher will be ascribing to the student a cognitive state which is indeed the accomplishment of institutional discourse (Luke 1991, pp.17-18).

The grids of behaviours and attitudes tabulated above indicate how students should relate to themselves and to the teacher. However as members of a classroom community, students were not only responsible to themselves but also to their peers. The student subject required here was a social being who demonstrates care for their community by being sensitive, helpful, cooperative, compassionate and by using their talents (sense of humour) and abilities (making insightful observations) for the good of the whole community. Thus the ideal student at Banfield at this time

was not the isolated competitive worker or even an active learner, but a socially responsible community member. Being fair and just, compassionate and having a sense of humour were placed alongside completing work and meeting deadlines. The student, as the citizen-to-be, was assessed on more than academic aptitudes or work rates. Thus the managerial discourse was recontextualised in the ethos of this parochial school.

In one sense, it was reassuring that while the managerialism had arrived in this small community school, this dominant discourse from the public sphere was modified and remodelled in this site. The analysis yielded a concrete illustration of the contradictory nature of the postmodern subject and how a multiplicity of discourses impact on teachers' work and literacy pedagogy. However, this broad analysis alone was insufficient in considering questions about the impact of these discursive formations on the lives of disadvantaged students and in particular the ways in which literacy was inserted into the construction of success and failure in the report cards. How would such a grid of competencies work for or against a student who was assessed as problematic? It is to Carlo's story to which I now turn.

When literacy is a 'challenge': Euphemism in teacher reporting

Carlo had been at Banfield for upwards of five years by the time the report reproduced below was written (see Fig.2). Carlo lived with both parents and several brothers and sisters. He spoke Italian as his first and family language and had learnt English as a second language at school. When this report was written he was in grade six in a grade five/six/seven composite class.

Fig 2 Carlo's Grade Six Report

BANFIELD SCHOOL REPORT

Carlo Year 5/6/7 April 1992

Carlo began this year with a positive attitude. His actions showed that he was determined to succeed. He was prepared each day with the things that he needed, he began work quickly and he remained on task. Carlo has maintained this attitude most of the term. Consequently, he is experiencing a successful term.

Our recent language work represented a major challenge for Carlo and he worked hard to meet it. During this work Carlo began to realise the importance of managing his time wisely. He is currently developing the skill of breaking the large task into smaller bits and then working through them, step by step. He is beginning to realise the need to clarify the task when he is unsure and to seek the help that he needs. He is gradually becoming aware of his own responsibility in his learning. With continued practice and encouragement Carlo will further develop in this area.

Carlo's main area of need at this stage is reading. He needs support and daily practice. I am encouraging Carlo to regularly change his book, to read at home and to read to me. He is showing positive signs of growth.

Carlo is helpful and co-operative in class. He is always willing to take on extra duties.

Signed teacher.....Principal.....

Carlo is evaluated across a grid of performance drawing on managerial, psychological and educational discourses. He has a 'positive attitude', 'his actions showed that he was determined to succeed', he has 'the things he that he needed', he 'began work quickly' and 'remained on task', 'he is experiencing a successful term'. However, the use of success in relation to a 'successful term' is qualified. In the second paragraph there are some signals that Carlo, despite his following the norms of hard work and effort, may not be experiencing the same kind of success as his peer Joel.

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In Carlo's case positive attitude may not be enough. We are told that the recent language work 'represented a major challenge for Carlo'. Then we are told that Carlo 'worked hard to meet it'. The teacher goes on to portray Carlo as needing to 'break the task into smaller bits' in order to work through them 'step by step'. While it is never made explicit, there are hints that Carlo finds school work difficult.

In Carlo's report, words such as 'major challenge', 'unsure', ' smaller', trigger warning bells for teacher readers, but may well go unnoticed by parent readers. Given their multiple audiences and functions, it is not surprising that teachers are cautious in what they write in reports. In anticipating student, parent, teacher, principal and other allied 'child professionals' as would be readers, teachers need to be careful. The report is a document intended to produce positive effects unobtrusively and to avoid producing negative effects. Euphemisms provide one technique for teachers to soften negative evaluations of the student (McKenzie 1992).

While Carlo has presented himself as the ideal student in terms of work habits and attitudes, the 'language work' continues to present him with a major challenge. After signalling that all is not completely, but without identifying exactly what is wrong, the teacher moves to reassure by promising that with 'practice and encouragement' Carlo 'will further develop in this area'. Exactly what 'this area' is remains unclear.

The report then goes on to state that Carlo's 'main area of need at this stage is reading'. Exactly what is needed is not specified, but if we deduce from what follows, it would appear that Carlo needs reading practice. He needs to change his book regularly, to read to his teacher and to read at home. The report indicates that the teacher is watching Carlo closely and that he needs to be checked regularly. Having been identified as a novice reader, Carlo is reported as requiring step by step practice and continual professional monitoring. Why Carlo needs this practice is not explained. This paragraph reassures parent readers that he is showing positive signs of growth, presumably in reading, though what these signs consist of is not explained.

The teacher is faced with multiple dilemmas in writing Carlo's report. Having set her criteria around work habits and attitudes, it is then difficult to write about a student who presents with these, but still struggles to succeed by academic criteria. Thus the report is written to acknowledge Carlo's efforts but to signal to a professional reader that all is not completely well. The chances are that this report could be heard by Carlo, his parents and siblings as 'successful', whilst the principal, future teachers and the principal of the selective high school to which he might apply, will recognise the euphemisms for a student experiencing learning and literacy difficulties – the child who needs the task broken into smaller bits, who experiences major challenges with his language work and who at eleven and a half years of age needs to read aloud to his teacher. Carlo (even with the right attitude, commitment, responsibility and work habits) is recognisable as a student with literacy difficulties, if

unspecified. Because literacy was presented as a stumbling block for Carlo's school success, I decided to investigate his archival records more closely, to see how he had come to this point in his schooling.

What counts as literacy ? Looking through Carlo's reports

Carlo's corpus of reports can be read as the dossier of a literate subject. I read the reports historically, making reference to dominant educational discourses especially those which relate to literacy education. My aim was to consider the discursive construction of the literate subject, with reference to one student. In analysing Carlo's report file my questions included: What counts as literacy? How does Carlo perform according to changing and non-changing criteria? What do Carlo's reports say about: Who Carlo can/should be? What must be transformed? What must Carlo do and be to be a success in the literacy classroom? What changes and what remains the same over his primary school career?

Focussing in particular on the literacy related entries, I followed Carlo's school career at Banfield through his reports from 1989 (the earliest on file) to 1993 making comparisons across the five year period. Through this longitudinal corpus, I worked towards historicising and contextualising the discursive construction of the contemporary literate subject at Banfield and I considered continuities and discontinuities as they related to one child's school experience.

Carlo's report archive began at grade three and concluded with grade seven. Reading the corpus of Carlo's school reports retrospectively was akin to reading a narrative of a child's life at school – a series of regular updates on Carlo as student. It also illustrated how the reporting of literacy was done over this period by a number of teachers and how different aspects of literacy are made to count differently at different times. Using the teachers' divisions and namings across the report cards I charted the aspects of Carlo's literacy performance which were reported over the period : writing (including spelling, handwriting, copying and punctuation); reading (including reading aloud, borrowing habits, difficulty of book); areas of challenge (including reading, spelling and handwriting); research work (including the Grand Prix and Dolphins); using the computer; behaviour during literacy lessons (including enthusiastic oral participation); and suggested changes to Carlo's literacy behaviour (including the need to practise reading and writing at home and to complete tasks).

Carlo's reports indicate that what is reported as literacy fluctuates. Research work and using the computer (areas where Carlo is reported as performing well) appear in grade six, but these literate practices are absent categories in all other grades. The impact of a particular teacher's approach is perhaps evident here. The changing nature of school literacies is also evident in relation to the status of stories. In early reports there were frequent references to stories: 'able to construct short stories', 'enjoying writing stories', 'producing longer stories', 'enjoys following a story with a picture', 'often

the first person to finish a story'. From grade five onwards however, stories are no longer mentioned. Rather we hear of Carlo's 'work',' his understanding that writing is for different purposes and has different styles', 'his language work', 'his recent research work', 'some good quality work'.

This change may have related to ongoing debates in Australia about the relative importance of students' reading and writing in genres other than personal narrative or story. Teachers at Banfield had participated in professional development courses about genre pedagogy and resource based learning which promised better literacy outcomes for disadvantaged students. At Banfield teachers took such messages seriously and made story writing less important. They worked hard on teaching the 'genres of power' and having children read and write information. At the same time they were under pressure to increase student productivity and outcomes. Thus the word work came to feature in assessing Carlo's literacy - 'his language work', 'his recent research work', 'some good quality work'.

The discursive traces of the report cards indicate which curriculum reforms have impact in what counts as literacy at a particular time and place. However, given the emphasis in much literacy related research about the importance of children from diverse and disadvantaged communities having opportunities to tell and write their own stories this closing down of this part of the literacy curriculum may signal a potential problem (Dyson & Genishi 1994). Whenever a narrowing of curriculum occurs it needs to be scrutinised in terms of whose interests are served by such a trend.

Apart from these curriculum changes there are other differences which relate quite directly to teachers' evaluations of Carlo's literacy. What is reported varies in different grades. For example, reading is sometimes a key category for reporting and sometimes ignored altogether. After being reported positively in grade three reading then disappears in Carlo's grade four and five reports, only to appear again in grade six. Pedagogical discourses allow Carlo to be seen as an 'independent reader' in grade three but for reading to be his 'major area of need' by grade six. Yet in grade seven, Carlo is simply reported to be more confident in reading aloud. In this case it is easy to see how children may become casualties of pedagogical trends. The frames for assessment affect what can be seen by the teacher and how it can be reported and produce effects for particular students which may make a difference to their school careers and life choices. For teachers who work with and for disadvantaged communities the pressure to attend to new priorities is great.

It is interesting is to see the discursive shifts in what counts as literacy in Carlo's report cards, but what difference might such changes make to Carlo and his classmates in their educational careers? For the remainder of the paper I discuss closely on the effects of changing pedagogical discourses on how Carlo's literacy was reported.

Discourses of development: Talking positive

In Carlo's grade three reports progressive discourses of development were dominant. The teacher's report writing is informed by the proposition that children, given the right conditions and support,

develop naturally and at their own rates. Thus the teacher writer focusses on what the child can do with print. Such discourse was dominant in the Early Literacy Inservice Course (ELIC) which all early years teachers in South Australia undertook in the mid to late eighties. Teachers were encouraged to welcome errors as signs of growth and see mistakes as evidence of new learning. The emergent literacy learner was encouraged to take risks. Teachers learnt how to watch children for developmental signs to write assessments which reported positively on 'what the child can do now' rather than what he or she could not do. Carlo's grade three reports indicate that his teacher has been extremely diligent in following this professional advice.

Carlo's grade three literacy is constructed in terms of writing skills and reading. Evidence of development is in Carlo's production of more text ('produce more', 'longer stories'), reading more. Other evidence of improvement are Carlo's 'attempts' to read more difficult vocabulary and books. Attitudes are also important as indicated by words such as 'enjoy', 'motivated', 'happy', 'positive', 'loves'. The teacher writer portrays Carlo as a child who is developing as a reader and as a writer and who is 'more attentive to the whole reading and writing area'. On the surface Carlo is doing just fine when the progressive criteria of healthy attitude and risk-taking are applied to his performance. However careful analysis of the text indicates that the teacher's positive evaluation is not unequivocal. Use of words such as 'more', 'longer', 'improved', 'capable', 'potential', 'now', 'coping', 'difficult', 'attempts', 'hard' and 'effort' signal Carlo's qualified success in early school literacy. Carlo's positive assessment is on the basis of his improvement, but Carlo has not yet 'made it'. He 'is capable of', 'beginning to understand' and 'has the potential to'. The message is that Carlo is now beginning to do what the literate student should and that if he keeps practising he will improve on the things that count: longer stories, spelling, punctuation and neatness.

The unstated model student happily reads and writes increasingly longer and more difficult stories and attends to correctness. A parent reader of these reports is reassured that what should be happening for Carlo's literacy is indeed happening. But the developmental discourse – becoming, beginning, developing, improving – makes it difficult to know where Carlo really stands.

By grade four Carlo's new teacher, whilst still using positive developmental discourse, begins to slip in more direct warnings that Carlo's continued development is contingent on his making some changes. His reports for this year can be seen as expressions of conditional or contingent improvement. Carlo will improve *if* he develops more refined listening skills *if* he practises his writing at home, *if* he practises his reading more too. His reports are laden with words and phrases which signal conditional growth: 'at times', 'when Carlo takes time', 'but', 'yet', 'perhaps', 'could', 'particularly' and 'when'. The teacher summarises this stance in the third report for the year.

> Often his true ability is affected by his lack of concentration. In order for any marked progress to occur, Carlo needs to become more dedicated and confident.

In this year's reports is also the first indication from a teacher that Carlo prefers the oral to the written mode.

> Generally he finds it far more exhilarating to discuss his thoughts and adventures.

Thus it seems that Carlo has not continued to produce more as he did in grade three and perhaps that the amount expected for grade four is more again than Carlo produces. In grade five this theme is continued. At this point the teacher writer states directly, if euphemistically, that Carlo finds some areas of learning challenging. The progressive developmental discourse - what Carlo can do - is placed alongside what Carlo does not do.

Carlo's literate performance is thus subjected to a kind of heteroglossia. At times he appears to be making progress, at others he is a cause for concern. Until grades five, six and seven however, there is no clear statement that Carlo's literacy performance requires anything other than patience, effort and practice. He is in a sense simultaneously protected and put at risk by the dominance of developmental theories in progressive educational discourse of that period. How this works can be seen more acutely through an analysis of the ongoing theme of spelling which appears in some form throughout Carlo's primary schooling.

While some things change over the years some things stay the same. Carlo's spelling remains a category for reporting in all grades, but how it is reported over time changes markedly.

Comments on spelling

Grade three	His spelling has improved and now displays an understanding of the sounds that make up words His spelling and punctuation skills have improved throughout the year
Grade four	He attempts to self-correct his work, by circling words which he is unsure of spelling
Grade five	He has shown a development in his understanding and knowledge of spelling skills and strategies and this has been evident in his writing
Grade six	His spelling, grammar and sentence construction has benefited from the extra time spent with him
Grade seven	His very real challenges lie in Spelling, Handwriting and copying. He needs to further develop strategies for word attack. He needs to carefully copy words. He needs to break up the words and he must apply all previous teaching to the word. Carlo is taking more responsibility for writing words but for his success he must take responsibility himself. He must see the value in correct Spelling and must always apply the strategies he is learning. Only he can do it

Even though spelling is never absent from Carlo's reports it is not explicitly defined as a problem until his final year of primary school. In earlier years the reports suggest that his spelling is

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improving. This talk of improvement implies that spelling is a difficulty but reassures the reader that it's getting better. Carlo understands the sounds that make up words, attempts to self-correct and had developed an understanding of spelling skills and strategies. In grade six he has 'benefited from the extra help' received in spelling, grammar and sentence construction. However by the middle of grade seven Carlo's spelling is made the teacher's major focus in the report. In the early years of Carlo's schooling two things are happening which serve to make spelling visible, but not a cause for concern. Firstly the process writing movement constructed spelling errors as signs of development. Secondly Carlo's early childhood status protects him from the expectation of correctness as a norm throughout his early and middle primary school days.

By the time Carlo reaches grade seven, however, process pedagogies have been severely challenged particularly in terms of the academic outcomes they produce for disadvantaged students. Newspaper publications have fabricated a literacy crisis. His elementary school career is near its end. He will soon move on to high school. How spelling is reported in these circumstances changes.

What can be said about spelling in 1989 differs from what can be said in 1993. In 1989, 1990 and 1991 Carlo's spelling is reported in the context of his writing development. His teachers employ the rhetoric of process-writing and developmental literacy pedagogies to account for Carlo's spelling: 'displays an understanding of sounds', 'self-corrects', 'circling words he is unsure of'. So long as there is improvement along the developmental grid, there is no problem. During this period Carlo is within the norms of 'healthy development' as defined by progressive accounts of literacy. In 1992 his teacher reports that he has extra time spent with him on spelling, grammar and sentence construction and that he has benefited from that. Carlo's receiving extra assistance is a clear sign that teachers perceive him as having difficulty in these areas. Nevertheless the positive reporting is maintained.

By 1993 however Carlo's time to develop appears to have run out! In this report Spelling (this time capitalised by the teacher writer) takes on a new significance in Carlo's formation as a literate subject. Here Carlo's spelling becomes an issue of moral identity. If Carlo is to have success he 'must take responsibility himself'. The repeated 'must' signals obligation. In 1992 and 1993, the obligation to take responsibility for oneself is a continued theme throughout the report corpus. It may refer to on task behaviour, meeting deadlines, abiding by school rules, treating others with respect and many other attributes required of the ideal Banfield student. On this occasion spelling becomes central to Carlo's success and *only he* can take responsibility and fix the problem. The teacher writer lays out the pedagogy required – what Carlo must do in order to become properly literate. The many years of time to develop now behind him Carlo must now do all that his previous teachers have told him in order to spell correctly and he must see the value in correct spelling.

In this context Carlo's literacy is no longer subject to the judgement of the patient, positive kid-watcher, but to a discourse of accountability to which even the primary school student must defer.

All of the previous teaching he has been given must now pay off. Carlo must now fix himself using the resources his previous teachers have given him. Not to learn to spell is irresponsible on his part.

One could read Carlo's reports as an exercise in unfairness. We might ask how is it that Carlo's spelling could be reported in positive terms for so long only to become a major cause of concern in his final year of primary schooling. But the 1993 report results not from any unfairness or lack of attention to a learner at risk, but becomes possible at this time in a way that it could not have been written earlier. Changes in how the literate student is reported in 1989 and in 1993 exemplify a discoursal change in education. It is not that the 1993 teacher writer suddenly blames Carlo, but that the kinds of student she is asked to produce in 1993 constitutes Carlo's spelling as a problem. If Carlo's spelling is a problem, then treating Carlo wholistically (because progressive discourses are not completely absent, merely displaced) constructed Carlo as a problem, as a student who has major work to do upon himself. Spelling becomes a moral issue - something which can be modified through taking responsibility for oneself.

Educational discourses, pedagogical bandwagons and student casualties

Pedagogical bandwagons borne out of educational discourses do have specific effects on children's school experiences, learning and the ways in which they are judged. Some of these effects can be seen as positive, where we see teachers working to preserve the self-esteem of their students. Developmental discourses direct teachers to see what the child can do. But developmental discourses also limit what teachers can say. In Carlo's story we can see how the professional knowledges directly impact on teachers' assessments and how Carlo's educational career becomes an unintended casualty in the process.

It is not that whole language or developmental progressive discourses per se are the culprits here, it is the certainty with which theories of learning and childhood proclaim how the child should be understood. The point here is that any pedagogical bandwagon or sets of educational theories brings with it associated risks. Genre, critical literacy, Reading Recovery and so on, all make claims to the truth about child literacy and hold out hopes of power for disadvantaged students. These expert discourses change what can be said, where teachers should look, whether they count mistakes as 'signs of growth' or as evidence of an 'at risk' student. The challenge is to develop ways of anticipating and analysing the risks that attend all educational theories, risks which increase exponentially when a theory achieves bandwagon status and promises 'the solution'.

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